

**DATE**

1 June 2016

**REFERENCE**

DG/rb/sg

**SUBJECT**

Urgent situation of PSM in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Mr Johannes Hahn

Commissioner for European  
Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement  
Negotiations

Dear Commissioner,  
Dear Mr. Hahn,

2016 is a difficult year for the European Union as well as for media in many EU and neighboring countries. It started in Poland, where the media regulatory body lost its independence and the public media has been brought under government control, the same happened in Croatia. In Romania, the public broadcaster is almost collapsing and I would like to now inform you about the alarming threat of collapse of the public service broadcaster in Bosnia and Herzegovina – which has a remit to contribute to the social cohesion of the country.

We were alarmed to learn of the decision of the Board of the public broadcaster in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BHRT) to cease broadcasting by 30 June of this year. If BHRT does indeed stop broadcasting, it would be – after Greece – only the second time that a public service broadcaster in Europe would be forced to stop broadcasting and the country would be the only one in Europe without a public broadcaster.

For outsiders it might look like only public broadcasters have a problem however this is wrong. The commercial media are often owned by wealthy entrepreneurs who depend on business contracts with the government. Many print media depend to a large extent on advertisement by the government. This is why media freedom is at stake. This development is bad for democracy, for society, for the economy and for the culture of the respective countries because there is a strong correlation between freedom of the media, the quality of the democratic institutions and the economic success of a country. It is for this reason that I am writing this letter to you.

The Treaty's Amsterdam Protocol clearly stresses that the system of public broadcasting is directly related to the democratic, social and cultural needs of each society and to the need to preserve media pluralism. Under European standards on public service broadcasting, adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, it is for each Member State to provide appropriate and secure funding for Public Service Media. In its Recommendation on Public Service Media governance of 2012, the Committee of Ministers reminded States of their responsibility to ensure that the "funding provided is adequate to meet the agreed role and remit of the Public Service Media, including offering sufficient security for the future as to allow reasonable future planning.

The Commission's progress report on Bosnia and Herzegovina from the end of 2015 already highlighted the very problematic situation of Public Service Broadcasting and stressed in particular that "the financial sustainability of the public service broadcasting system remains to be ensured". The European Parliament, in its Resolution of April this year called for "the editorial independence and financial stability of the public service broadcasters to be enhanced in view of the significance of the existence of a public service broadcaster for the unity of BiH".

The current funding system of the public broadcaster in Bosnia and Herzegovina does obviously not fulfill these criteria and it will certainly also overshadow its aspirations to become a Member State of the EU one day.

We urge the European Commission, the European Parliament and the international institutions in the respective countries to back us in calling the governments to come up with a credible and long-term solution to funding Public Service Media in the countries and supporting this nascent democracy.

Yours sincerely,

Ingrid Deltenre  
Director General